

A "Call to Arms" for Health Care Workers

By the nature of our jobs, we in the health care field are this nation's (and the world's) front-line soldiers in the war against AIDS. As you know, no vaccine or cure for this killer has been found. The only weapon that we on the front line have, therefore, is education.

At the Federal level, approximately 107 million copies of a brochure called "Understanding AIDS" were distributed to every household and post office box in the nation in late May and early June. We have received outstanding support from the national media, including the print, radio, and television industries, that has been instrumental in our efforts to communicate. Celebrities from the entertainment industry such as Chita Rivera, Dionne Warwick, Elizabeth Taylor, Morgan Fairchild, and Johnny Depp, to name a few, have been most generous with their time and have expanded the audience receiving important AIDS information immeasurably. Similar efforts are also taking place at the State and local levels.

However, difficult problems, especially one as complex and ever-changing as AIDS, require repeated, yet compassionate educational and outreach efforts. In July, I presented special awards to 14 nurses for their selfless dedication and leadership in the direct nursing care of people with AIDS. Direct nursing care, however, is only one of the many important battlefronts in this war.

As I stated previously, until we have a cure or a vaccine, the only way that we can stop AIDS is to make sure that every American has the facts about

it. The most important of these facts is that each individual, by his or her intelligent choices about personal behavior, can avoid both infection and the spread of the AIDS virus. I am calling upon all health professionals to keep abreast of AIDS issues, learn as much as you can about the disease, and get those facts to your community.

Health professionals are among the most highly respected and regarded members of any local community. This fact, combined with your knowledge and talents, make you "naturals" to carry forth the facts about AIDS into your communities. I am asking you to find ways to act as spokespersons in your community, making the extra effort to reach out and teach others about AIDS. There are still far too many misconceptions about AIDS and how it is contracted. Basic everyday facts about AIDS have to be communicated: you cannot get AIDS from an insect bite or from such things as shaking hands with or hugging an infected person, eating food prepared by someone who is infected, using public toilets, or sharing an office with someone who has AIDS.

As a nation, we cannot afford, through ignorance, for our children to be denied access to the classroom, for the sick to be denied adequate and compassionate care, or for affected families to lose their jobs and their homes. As health professionals, we cannot afford NOT to take up our weapon—education—and lead this fight.

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